

**'We were sharing him with
all Americans,
black and white'**



**The making of a TV-film rekindles
memories for Martin Luther King's widow**

By Coretta Scott King

[On Feb. 12, 13 and 14, NBC will rebroadcast "King," a dramatization of the life of the late Martin Luther King Jr.—Ed.]

Standing on a movie set last summer watching actor Paul Winfield portray my husband brought back many, many beautiful memories of the wonderful years Martin Luther King and I enjoyed

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together. Modern makeup techniques are so artistically developed that the resemblance of Paul to my husband, Cicely Tyson to me, and Ossie Davis to Daddy King was breathtaking and impressive. And when these three superb artists moved into their roles of the drama "King," it was an experience at once strange and beautiful.

There already are several films, of course, that have been made about my

husband and his role as leader of the civil-rights movement. This film by Abby Mann, however, looks at Martin Luther King Jr. as a man, as a husband, as a father and as a minister as well as a public activist for human rights.

The shooting of the film reminded me once again of the fact that Martin and I had no inkling of the role in history that he was about to play when we moved to Montgomery, Ala., in 1954, where my husband became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

When events did thrust Martin into the leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott, however, he was ready. His years of study and intellectual probing of the concept of nonviolence prepared him well to instill the principles of meeting hate with love in all of us who were involved in ending segregation.

I believe it was the nonviolent nature of the protests, not only in Montgomery but everywhere we battled discrimination, that made the difference in the long run. If those protesting the indignities of second-class citizenship at the hands of Birmingham's police chief Bull Connor or Sheriff Jim Clark in Selma had retaliated with equally inhuman tactics, we might never have made the progress that we did. But when the majority of white Americans saw on television the brutality of segregation in action at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, for example, they reacted as Martin knew they would—with revulsion and sympathy and with demands that somehow this deprivation of human rights must stop.

It's also obvious to me that little would have been accomplished without television. When the cattle prods and fire hoses and tear gas were brought, figuratively, right into the living rooms of Americans, that is when the movement began to make its biggest impact. Americans could no longer ignore the injustices and the inhumanity of what was going on.

Martin believed that once decent

Americans—black and white—saw what was happening, the path to fairness and justice would be much, much shorter. He was criticized, usually by those who did not understand the situation, for "forcing" the issue publicly and making those responsible for the inequities take their stand in the full glare of the television cameras. As we now all realize, this was the best means of bringing about real solutions, on a national scale and without violence.

What happened in Birmingham not only ended the tragedy of segregation in that city, it generated the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And what took place in Selma not only ended generations of disenfranchisement there, it also triggered the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Both Federal acts, of course, gave social and legal relief to millions of minority citizens in thousands of towns across America. In their turn they enlarged democracy by creating a multimillion black electorate for the first time in our national history. This further ensured that nonviolence, through use of the ballot, would continue as the predominant mode of social change.

One aspect of the "King" film I hope comes through to the viewers at home is the fact that Martin never relished any of these "public" encounters. After his family, his first love was always the ministry. He cared deeply about his work in the church, and, from those first meetings in December 1955 through the call for help that brought him to Memphis, he always preferred that somehow others could lead the marches, or make the speeches, or be the inspirational force. But time after time events dictated that it had to be Martin Luther King who rallied our supporters, who focused media attention on the key issue at stake, who kept tight the reins so that only non-violent means were used, who articulated for all concerned the human rights that needed to be upheld and vindicated. →

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In those hectic years, Martin worked hard to be with his family as much as possible, but the calls to our country's conscience became more and more frequent, and the calls for Martin's personal leadership became even more insistent. As a family, we believed we were sharing him with all Americans, black and white, and I regret none of the time my husband was away from us because I knew it was time being spent on a most noble cause, the cause of freedom.

As the civil-rights movement matured, as we obtained more and more of our social and political rights, as Federal legislation began to open the voting booths, integrate public accommodations and end some of the more blatant barriers to citizenship, my husband turned more and more of his attention to the issue of economic justice. It made little sense to integrate lunch counters if you didn't have enough money to buy a meal.

It was, as the film shows, an economic issue—giving sanitation workers a decent enough salary to support their families—that brought my husband to Memphis 10 years ago. A few months earlier he had delivered the "Massey Lectures" to our Canadian friends, and these talks were later published as "The Trumpet of Conscience." In them, Martin delivered an eloquent appeal for a new order of economic justice, one in which our society would start making up for generations of neglect and deprivation.

And it is to that goal of economic justice that The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Social Change has devoted much of its efforts. The Center is a living memorial to my husband, attempting on one hand to keep alive the legacy of what was accomplished in those 13 turbulent public years, while also working today to do those things Martin would be attempting to do if he were still alive. Thus, we are concentrating as hard as we can on

reaching the goal of full employment.

Providing a meaningful job at a decent wage for everyone who wants to work is the key to unlocking the door to economic justice. And until that is accomplished, we are not going to solve the ills of generations of neglect and mistreatment. If we are serious about wanting to restore and revive the moral fabric of our decaying cities, we have to find jobs for all of our people. We cannot solve the problems of inadequate nutrition, meager health care, substandard housing, rising crime, inferior education and all the other social diseases of crowded urban areas, if we don't solve first the problem of putting people to work. When the head of the house has a job, we can then hope to bring stability and harmony and peace to that family and that neighborhood. Jobs mean peace—and a hope for an opportunity to share the fruits of our bountiful society. Joblessness breeds both despair and a loss of personal dignity.

We must, and we shall, find a way to break the grinding chain of poverty for many of our citizens. That was Martin's goal when he was with us, and it is our goal today.

The movement led by my husband was, and is, a living, breathing, constantly active campaign to establish human rights everywhere. I hope that the "King" film will give all Americans a fresh perspective of that campaign, as well as a look at Martin Luther King Jr. as a man and as a leader.

At the same time I hope the viewers realize that there is still so much more to be done to fulfill his dream that all people everywhere can someday share equally their God-given rights as human beings. We have certainly come far since Montgomery, but there is still a long way to go. Martin's unique championship of social justice did not die with him. It lives in the people who share his goals and continue fighting for them, day in and day out. **END**